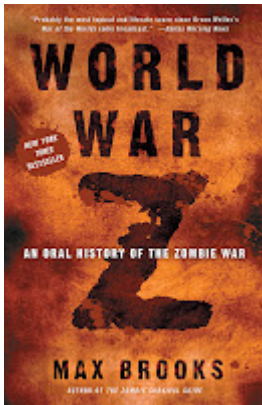


Review: World War Z



What a fun read. I was lent Max Brooks' *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* to read after my recent abortive attempt at reading fiction.

Now I don't get the whole zombie thing. I know it's been around for years and maybe it's just facebook exposure but the whole zombie party or zombie flash-mob seems to be increasing.

And it's just... I don't know, I just don't get it. All I've been able to glean is that to be true to canonical zombie-lore a zombie story must involve brains and slow shuffles with arms held out. In which case, WWZ is truly non-apocryphal.

I liked the style. The narrative is framed around a series of interviews in which you hear each interviewee speak in the first person with the odd question or description from the interviewer. You can imagine this book as a Four Corners story or some other documentary with talking faces on black backgrounds and the odd snippet of stock footage. I've been watching "The Pacific" – it's almost like that. Brooks does a marvellous job of maintaining the fourth-wall. The narrative, being of our own era, merges with your own TV-viewing experiences of Iraq War accounts and the like and you are convinced.

I've heard complaints about the plot – how it peters out at the end. It didn't matter. The book wraps up with short comments from those who have "spoken" earlier. That's how documentaries end. There's even a quote from a classical

Australian rock ballad on the last page – that’s got to be worth something.

It has all the zombie-stuff: the gore, the moans, the oozing puss and the baseball bats. But it sneaks this into an interweaving symphony of character study so much that you don’t mind. And you don’t feel the need to join the next flash mob.

Which I won’t, unless some zombiephile can explain to me the point.



Review: Spook Country



I appreciated *Neuromancer*. But how do I describe William Gibson’s book *Spook Country*? There is only one word:

Incomprehensible. Completely incomprehensible.

After two chapters I felt like I needed to do what you had to do with one of those text-based adventure games on PC – get out a pen and scrap paper and draw a map of the plot so I knew where to go in the equivalent semantic darkness of “You see a forest with a path running through it.” The plot is probably not insipid or tenuous, is just that I couldn’t disentangle it

from the thickets of memories, anecdotes, insertions of the landscape into the metaphor of the moment, and words, words, lots of words.

The scene and character descriptions are rich, very rich, but so much so that you don't know what information is important to retain or leave on the page. Taking what you think you need to remember from a scene you realise a couple of chapters later that all Gibson was doing was describing a kitchen appliance or something. And meanwhile you feel presumptuously narrated into an arc where there's an apparently primary character who feels like a complete stranger.

I think the book is about "locative art" – a form of augmented reality. Which is a cool, and interestingly associated with the virtual reality of *Neuromancer*. And there's a woman that used to be in a band as one of the characters – although I'm not sure if the band is important. It wasn't by Page 159, which is where I gave up.

Perhaps someone will turn it into a movie. Or five – not sequels, but five completely different whole movies. You wouldn't be able to tell.

